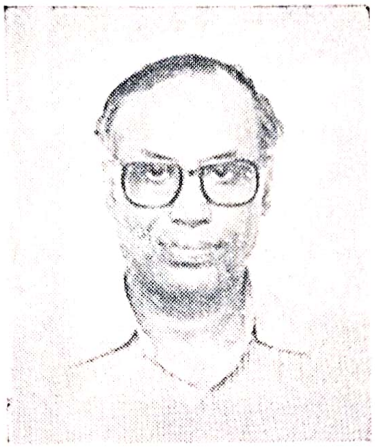

SIGNIFICANCE OF TRANSLATED WORKS FOR IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

—INDRA NATH CHOUDHURI*

The title of this paper postulates that for improving the quality of children's literature, it is imperative to have translations from other languages. There is no denial of the fact that translations help in the development of a language and also the literature written in that language. In a multi-lingual situation like ours, either it is inter-lingual translations or translations of foreign literature which add to the literature of any of the Indian languages. But the basic thing is the development of the national literature consonant with the cultural ethos of the Indian society. The talent has to spring from the soil of the country. The originality and indigenousness are the prime factors for the improvement of any literature including children's literature.

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*Professor Indra Nath Chaudhari (1936) Ph.d. *in Comparative Literature from Delhi University, knows besides English, 4-5 Indian languages including Sanskrit and also French and Romanian. He worked as Reader, Delhi University and later as Professor and Head of Post-Graduate Research Complex, Hyderabad. He was sent by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) as a Visiting Professor of Hindi Language and Literature at the University of Bucharest (Romania), 1973-74. He specialises in Comparative Literature, Comparative Theatre and Poetics. Currently, he is the Secretary, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi.*

He has participated in several international and national Seminars at Paris, New York, Tokyo, London, Hawaii, Moscow, Singapore etc. He also chaired one of the sessions of International Conference in Translation Studies at New Delhi, and represented the Sahitya Akademi at the 59th and 60th General Assembly session of the Union of Academique Internationale, Brussels, in 1985 and 1986. He was also sent by ICCR as leader of Writers' delegation for China, 1985 under Indo-China Cultural Exchange Programme. He has published books on Comparative Literature, Poetics and Drama in English Bengali and Hindi.

Translations can come only at the second stage for adding richness to a literature which is quite developed and well received. There is a general dearth of children's literature in India except in a few languages like Bengali, Marathi etc. It is quite surprising that in a country which has such a rich treasure of folk literature, really talented and highly imaginative writers are lagging behind in the field of children's literature.

The basic drawback, as pointed by Sri K.S. Karanth, has come from our own lack of proper education (Comparative Indian Literature, v. 2, ed. K.M. George, p. 1148). He says that we have made childhood a sort of a vessel, which has to be filled up by elders and teachers, with material that they consider useful or worthwhile. Knowledge so provided has to be useful in facing life in all its aspects. But it does not care to look at things from a child's point of view. The child is not its central figure. It lacks charm and imagination. We talk glibly about children's literature, their make-beliefs, their illusions, but how much do we really know of their state of mind and the expression of childish imagination and ideas ?

I remember one striking example when some years back my elder daughter was playing shop with her younger sister. The elder one was shopman at the time when my wife came into her room and kissed her. She broke out into piteous sobs—my wife could not understand why. At last my daughter sobbed out, "Mother, you never kiss the man in the shop!"

Tagore wrote several poems for children confirming their hidden wishes to act like adults. In one of the poems, the boy says that when he grows up like his father, then one evening, he will pick up the walking stick and go to the local club. And at that time, if the tutor comes and asks for the books as well as the homework, he will say, "Don't you see, now I am grown up like my father! There is nothing to study." Then the tutor will reply. "Okay, Babu Sahib, then I go." Child's fantasy does not mean whimsy eccentricity or triviality. It is another name for that world of imagination which is fuelled by desire. The fantasy comes to the rescue of the child by extending the desires beyond what is possible or reasonable, by remaking the past and inventing a future. But it is always done under the socio-cultural framework within which a child grows.

The literature in difftrent Indian languages has enriched itself with from translations of materials from the vast store of Sanskrit literature. Translations of the *Panchatantra* and *Hitopadesha* or stories from the two great epics or from the scriptures like the *Vedas, Upanishads* or *Jatakas* and *Puranas* have a relevant place as reading materials for children. The socio-cultural framework of these stories does not hamper Indian Children in understanding them. Sri Karanth thinks that the stories from the *Panchatantra* and *Hitopadesha* with their moralistic approach may not quite meet the demands of child readers, but on the contrary, the Indian epics, legends and myths by their very nature, can raise questions about many implicitly accepted beliefs and assumptions which satisfy the questioning mind of a child reader. He thinks children's stories must raise questions. Banning such questions would mean suppression of their independent thinking. I may humbly suggest that Karanth's approach of looking at children's literature from an adult's point of view is not very plausible. A child will definitely like to prove black as black and white as white, but at the same time, he will scrupulously like to avoid all shades of grey. Not because greys do not exist in children's world, but because they do not fit into the fantasy of their world. Here I

may give examples of a Bengali story *Alithi* written by Tagore and its translated Hindi version *Geet Gata Chal* which was later made into a film. *Atithi* is the story of a small boy who, because of his intense desire to gain new experiences of life and his quest for beauty in nature and man, could not be kept bound to his family. He always ran away from his house. At last he felt temporarily sheltered in a landlord's house and emotionally inclined towards his daughter. But then, one day he saw a horseman (a very powerful image in children's literature), who was going to attend a carnival and then by the riverside, he saw boats filled with dancers, singers and musicians all going to the carnival. In the Hindi translation, rather adaptation of the story, *Geet Gata Chal,* the plot is the same except that in the end the boy marries the girl and stays happily thereafter. The original Bengali is more philosophical and artistic and touches the imagination of an adult viewer more than of a child. In the Bengali story the balance between imagination and reality, and the inter-mixture of fantasy nad experience is infinitely more complex. On the contrary, the Hindi translation attracts the collective fantasy of the children because of its anti-psychological nature. It emphasizes the central features of fantasy as found in children's fairy tales: the fulfilment of wishes, the humbling of competitors and the destruction of enemies. I must add here that grey or the situational dilemma of a story has also its own role in the making of children's literature. It provokes a child to think but not exactly logically.

Some of the very good stories express ideas conjured up by a vivid imagination which are not completely understood. That is why a child wants to hear the same story over and over again, for it means something to him although he may have no conception of what it does mean. The story is set up as a spectacle mostly on a historical plane with an anti-psychological content primarily to entertain the children. In the process, the children's world is restructured, having a fantastic impact, but not devoid of the cultural values of the social world in which the child reader lives.

Here comes the fundamental question of cross-cultural communication in translation from one language to another. It is generally believed that the relation between a body of discourse and the meanings expressed by its sentences is not exclusively a formal semantical relation. The semantic accounts of source language and target language include ethnological analysis of the respective linguistic communities. Two fairy tales can be taken up to give an example — one from India and the other from Europe. The villain in the Indian story is a snake and a witch is the villain in the European fairy tale. Except this difference, the story is one and the same. The villain takes away the princess. Both the villains speak in a human voice. Both have the same function and the purpose of the story is to show the bravery of the prince. At the end, the princess is rescued, and the villains are either ruefully contrite or their battered bodies satisfactorily litter the landscape. In Indian cultural situation, the snake rather than the witch is nearer to the imagination of a child. So, the villain in the form of a witch substantially indicates the cultural distance between the respective source and target language children's communities.

It is essential that the translator may help the reader in picking up the core meaning of the original text. It is very difficult to touch the core. We learn from touching it. Only by touching we can know how profound it is — and then only we are able to reach nearest to that point of the distance between two cultures. The job of a translator is to turn strangeness

into likeness, and in the process, the strangeness of the original becomes more vivid and this vividness itself liberates us from the cultural prison and gives us the taste of another culture. This broadens the horizon of the child reader. Of course, there are foreign classics like *Fairy Tales* by Hans Andersen or *Treasure Island* by Robert Louis Stevenson or *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe which are able to create characters that a child can easily identify himself with and which help children to be led to a different land altogether and enlarge their vision of the world. Such stories are unfortunately few in modern literature.

Translations of other children's literature with definite cultural overtones become problematic. Hans Andersen's fairy tales with Danish background, when translated into other European languages, did not pose any problem as Danish culture is an integral part of the European culture and moreover, as said earlier, there are certain works produced within a cultural region which goes beyond the spell of its immediate historical context, transcends the time barrier and becomes a classic, which has an appeal to all the young minds with diverse cultural and historical backgrounds. But the problem starts with the translation, say from Bengali into English of a book of poetry like *Abol Tabol* by Sukumar Ray. The translation is very ably done by Professor Sukanta Chaudhuri which includes the poems from *Abol Tabol* — a caption which is just untranslatable. Sukanta has captioned it as the *Select Nonsense* of Sukumar Ray. Even the poems which are full of puns and alliteration and onomatopoeia for humorous effect render it difficult for translations. The cultural specificities forming part of the poem are re-contextualised by the translator in order to convey the cultural manner which suits target language children readership. Sukanta Chaudhuri is alive to two cultures so he can attempt to build the bridge between them. Let us take the poem *Satpatra*, the good bridegroom, which is translated as *A Marriage is Announced*. It is obvious that a foreign child may not have an idea of the arranged marriage so the caption takes care of that. Some of the cultural references like the *Yatradal* (the folk theatre company) is changed into music-halls and the *progeny of Kansaraja* is turned into *Grand Panjandrum's Direct Seed*. In English culture it is a burlesque title of an imaginery personage used in some nonsense lines by Samuel Foote, an English actor and dramatist of 1977. But what is impossible is to keep the original rhyme intact in translation. The original poem reads something like this.

Sunte palum Posta giye
Tomar naki mayer beye?
Gangaram ke patra pale?
Jante chai se karmon chele?
Mando nay se patro bhalo
Rang joliyo bajay kalo;
Tar upore mukher gathan
Anekta tik panchar noton

The English translation does not have this rhythm:

I went Post, and said
Your daughter was about to wed,
And Gangaram's the lucky man!
So let me tell you what I can.
Dear Gangaram's a comely youth——
A shade too dark, to tell the truth—
And on his face, a constant scowl
A little like an angry owl.

Even then, here the translator has made himself free from his role as an objective mediator and kept his child receptors in mind and foreseen their possible reactions, conditioned by the presuppositions and

the behaviour patterns of their culture. This attitude has made the cross-cultural children's literature translation somewhat possible. I remember one song of the German play for children *Strokolok Mili-pili* rendered into Hindi having a rhythm which was so much different from German but quite attuned with the sensitive ears of Indian children.

Chuk chuk chuk chuk
Chuk chuk chuk chuk
Chali chali
Chali chali
Chali hamari railgari
Ham tum ham tum ja rahe hain
Suraj suraj suraj suraj
Dhup dhup dhup dhup
Nili laharen khil khilati hame bulati

Abol Tabol includes Ha-Ja-Ba-Ra-La (A topsy-turvey tale) which is the finest piece of nonsense in Bengali prose. Sri Satyajit Ray, son of Sukumar Ray, thinks that this tale is obviously influenced by *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.* There is the same falling asleep on the grass; the same dream; the same pageant of known and half-known beasts and humans, the same hints at linguistic lapses, social customs and legal procedures; and finally, the return to reality. Yet nothing could be more quintessentially Bengali than the latest spirit of the topsuturvy world. Now, a Bengali tale which is influenced by a foreign tale and still keeps the Bengali 'enculturation,' actually means that it does possess the phenomenon of values which is common to all cultures or the universal children's world. To a mere child reader, this helps in broadening one horizon and helps an adult it to develop a cross-cultural perspective.

Translations of children's books from foreign into Indian languages and vice versa will of course help in developing significantly the scope of Indian and world children's literature. But then, one may have to keep in mind that the theme of a children's book need not be within a child's experience, but within the range of a child's imagination and the imagination takes shape not only in the child's psychical and physical environment, but also in relation to the universal view of justice. So, while selecting the children's books for translation, the stress should be on a theme which is in tune with the imagination of a child which is sustained by a sense of justice. Children love justice but even justice can be a relative term. A children story by the famous Hindi writer Yashpal, when translated into Russian, created such a hue and cry among thousands of young Russian children that they even wrote numerous letters of protest to the editor of the magazine in which the story was published. The story was of a young boy who was playing in a garden where there was a huge banyan tree with a big hole in its trunk. The boy peeped into it and accidentally fell into it. Underneath he found himself in the kingdom of a demon. The father of the boy came to the garden in search of the boy and he too slipped and landed in the palace of the demon. Both were caught by the demon who promised to set them free provided one of them cut his fore finger to give to the demon which would retrieve his human daughter from a deep slumber. Both the son and the father insisted in giving one's own finger, but ultimately, it was the son who could prevail over his father and the father at last agreed that his son might cut his fore-finger to give to the demon. The story ended there which caused a spate of protests among the Russian children. They even said that Yashpal can be a writer of adults, but definitely not of children. He does not know anything of the child psyche. Yashpal was influenced by the Indian model of morality (Dharma)

—dedication, self-sacrifice and obedience shown by sons like Rama towards fathers like Dasaratha which leads to sufferance for the sons. It may suit an Indian mind but even an Indian child may feel it hard to accept. After all, children's literature should possess human values which are abiding in nature and have an appeal of warm and lively touch and not depicting a cold reason.

The imagination of a child is always nurtured by the universal features of the story sustained by a sense of justice. However different the surface level may be, the *extension* of the manifested form is to be juxtaposed with the *intension* of the indepth world of a child which is one and the same all over the world. So, I changed the ending of the story and related it to my daughters that a Bramhadaitya who lived on that tree saw everything and felt extremely pleased with the boy for his exemplary devotion towards his father and gave him a boon which enabled him to get back his fore-finger. The demon gave his human daughter to the young boy and they married and lived happily thereafter. My daughters were extremely satisfied and all of a sudden, I found them caring a little more for me and their mother. That evening, I found them very much disciplined. After coming back from the playground, they kept their things at proper places, did their home task and ate their dinner with us, drank their milk without fuss and changed into their night suits and said good night and went to bed. After a few moments, we went to their room and found them deep in sleep with a serene satiated dreamy posture on their sleepy faces. I looked at my wife. She smiled.